

**Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 2**

**“1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:**

**2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;**

**3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;**

**4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;**

**5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;**

**A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose;**

**A time to keep, & a time to throw away;**

**7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;**

**8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.**

**9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.**

**12 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. 15 That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; & God requires an account of what is past. 16 Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there. 17 I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."”**

## **“The Importance of Seasons”**

**We come once again to the season of Advent, and as always few of us can believe that it is upon us already! I will be presenting the first two messages this year: My plan, Lord willing, is to discuss the purpose of Advent and a bit about the Church calendar in general this week and focus on the first advent of Jesus in His incarnation next week.**

**As we always point out, the season of Advent is both the beginning and the end of the church calendar. It is a time where we focus on and celebrate the coming of Jesus as the Lamb of God Who came as the little babe in Bethlehem to take away the sins of the world: Thus it stands as the beginning of our church year.**

**It is also a time where we remember the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus as the triumphant King of Kings Who will at that coming have brought all the nations of the earth under His dominion and then Judge all the earth and defeat the final enemy which is death!**

- In between we move through the church calendar which is done in different ways in different parts of the world and even in different ways in different churches.**

**To understand why such a calendar is important we must step back and see the importance of times and seasons which is what a calendar marks.**

**We saw this in the earliest verses of the Book of Beginnings where the whole Creation is divided into day and night, a cycle that continues to our day.**

Now as King Solomon pointed out in our morning reading, we know there is wickedness in the creation today because of the fall of man & 'darkness' is often thought of as sinister and evil, but we must remember that this is the result of the sin of man impacting the created order but in the beginning God declared both day & night to be very good. With the 4<sup>th</sup> Day of Creation we see the sun, moon and stars placed in the heavens to "divide the day from the night; and ... for signs and seasons, and for days and years."

- When we see these majestic works of God it should certainly make the case that God thinks that times and seasons are important!

Of course here too we see the impact of the fall of man when you consider the wicked history of men worshipping the sun and things like godless astrology. Understanding God's control and love of times and seasons is a major part of having a Christian world view and our Church calendar can be a major help in this area...

- When it is central in our lives it assists in keeping us properly focused on Jesus & His work!

When last I was in this pulpit I brought the series of messages on the importance of the Lord's Day and how we are called together for worship on the First Day of each week.

Now we will consider the broader time frame of the year. So kids let's think about time and seasons... How many hours in a day?

- That is right 24: Twelve for the light and twelve for the darkness!
- But what establishes the length of our days?

Again, that is right: The Sun, but why is that the case? A very important question to ask!

Now we have a couple of ways to consider why: Most of our modern world things that billions of years ago there was a BIG bang where nothing became something for no reason and later our sun formed out of a mass of hot gases and in the process threw off the planets, including the earth and that the spin of the earth ended up being 24 hours and thus we have our 24 hour days.

This stands in stark contrast with what the Bible revealed and it is a VERY important contrast for us to understand and remember: Genesis tells us that God placed the sun, moon and stars in the heavens, above the earth and that by His command they keep track of the times and seasons He had established...

It is important to remember that we had morning and evening in the created order BEFORE the sun was assigned its task of keeping track! Now of course our skeptic friends will simply say that Genesis was a fairy tale made up to explain what those primitive people did not know about science! BUT, right in the middle of all this scientific precision there is an important part of our times & seasons that we do not get from such natural objects.... Everyone agrees that the sun marks our days and our years and the moon accounts for our months, but what about the week? Why seven days?

Now this is an important question because the entire world operates on a seven day week and always has with very few short-lived exceptions...

- So why seven days in a week?

Yes, it follows God's original seven days of creation which is why seeing those first days as literal days is so important! It is where God established all the times and seasons, most of which we see in the guardians of them that God placed in the heavens...

- But we know about the week only because God revealed His creative work to mankind, in early history and in the Book of Genesis!

And I will be bold and say there is NO plausible alternative... I confirmed this with a Google search and the results were interesting. A discussion at the BBC was at least honest:

**“But while the movement of Earth and Sun give us natural concepts like days and years and the Moon's phases give us the month, there is no such natural reason for a seven-day week.”**

**Of course they can't bring themselves to acknowledge that it comes from God and most try their hardest to avoid such a conclusion, which should not surprise us... From the cite “What I learned Today” we see this after they show that trying to get a seven day week from the lunar cycles really makes no sense... “Unlike the Babylonians, where it appears they were attempting to follow the lunar cycles with their seven day week, it isn't known why the Jews picked seven days, outside of Christians and Jews of course believing that it was by the decree of God.”**

- **A good example of what Paul refers to as suppressing the truth!**

**And of course most are even more adamant that God should have nothing to do with this reality...**

**From Peter Meyer on Why a Seven Day week... “It is a mistake to believe that our 7-day week has its origins in the command of the biblical YHWH, since the 7-day week is older than the Hebrews, having been used by the Sumerians and Babylonians.”**

**Of course what they conveniently overlook is the fact that Moses did NOT invent or even establish the seven day week in the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, but rather acknowledged that it had been there from the very beginning of creation.**

- **Those who read the Bible honestly know where the Babylonians and others learned of the seven day week!**
- **Attempts to change this come in rebellious nations like Rome, or the French and Russian revolutions which as I said were short lived!**

**So we can see that God has established times and seasons and now I want us to see that a church calendar is a vital part of remembering this great truth! The Church calendar assists us in keeping Jesus at the center of our lives as He should be!**

- **Our church calendar reflects the times & seasons in the created order.**

**Each day has the cycle of light and darkness, with a sunset to end the day and a sunrise to begin a new day. Each midnight is the end of one day and the beginning of another. Each year moves through spring & summer and then fall & winter, following again the pattern of light and darkness. Each year we have the spring that brings new life leading to the bounty of summer and a fall that prepares for the sleep of winter. The rest at the end of the cycle, brings the beginning of a new cycle.**

**Thus we have Advent playing this role in the Church calendar which revolves around the life and work of Jesus... Moving through the church calendar we first have Christmas and the birth of the Son of God. Next comes Epiphany where the Son of Man is revealed and we consider His life and ministry.**

**After this comes the Passion Week and the work of Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world! The Easter season then takes us to Ascension Sunday where we remember that Jesus sits enthroned in Heaven as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords taking history where God intended it to go from the beginning of time.**

**After this comes Pentecost where we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the Bride of Jesus the Church for this work of service.**

**We then mark the second half of the Church year as normal or ordinary time where we see the impact of the work of Jesus in our everyday lives. All of the Epistles end with commands for living as we should and even the Lord's Prayer tells us to ask for our daily bread and to ask forgiveness and extend forgiveness in our everyday lives as we pray that God's will be carried out on earth as it is in heaven.**

**All of this work will find its final and complete fulfillment in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus, which of course brings us back to the Advent season.**

- **Those are the highlights and I would argue the essentials of the church calendar.**
- **More can be added, but these major markers should be a part of every Christian's walk!**

**Roman and Eastern Churches have calendars with something or someone to remember each day of the year. Many in the protestant world, including some of our own families remember a time of repentance in Lent before Easter each year and we have as a church always celebrated Trinity Sunday and Reformation Day to help us remember and highlight important doctrines that we find in the Scriptures.**

**Now of course many will tell us that we don't find a command about keeping a church calendar in the New Testament! Of course that would ignore what I have already discussed about the importance of times and seasons...**

- **And the fact that we see the Jewish feasts and celebrations still playing a role in the lives of Saints like the Apostle Paul until the destruction of the Temple.**

**The Church calendar that has come down to our time was developed to continue the pattern we see in the Scriptures with a proper focus on Jesus!**

- **Also it is important to point out that you cannot simply say I don't care about calendars!**

**We live in God's creation and it is one that revolves around times & seasons. Even at the consummation of the Kingdom we still see the Trees of Life on the banks of the river giving their fruit each month!**

- **If you ignore the Church calendar the secular world is more than happy to fill the void that will be left in your life.**

**Consider the American calendar that our children would be encouraged and trained to follow if left to the world... Their beginning and end comes with New Years Day...**

- **Party time as they remember the year that has ended and make empty resolutions for the New Year!**

**There will be days to remember men like Martin Luther King Jr. or Abraham Lincoln. Of course Easter season has been replaced with "Spring Break" and then we need to worship our mother on Earth Day!**

**We have our national holidays with Memorial Day and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but of course they must be devoid of any of the Christian heritage that inspired such liberty and sacrifice! In the fall you come to Labor Day with a focus on man's work and then Reformation Day is replaced with Halloween which is now 2<sup>nd</sup> only to Christmas in the consumer world. As I mentioned earlier this week Thanksgiving is still on the calendar but it has been subsumed by the polar opposite celebration of Black Friday, where instead of giving thanks for what God has provided, we think only of what else we think we need!**

**And of course the end of the year has no mention of Advent & Jesus who is replaced with Santa Claus and we celebrate a winter holiday.**

- **When presented this frankly it is easy to see the contrast and hopefully we would all want to flee to the Church calendar!**

**But sadly the world, our flesh and the devil are much more subtle in their efforts to take our eyes off of Jesus. We say surely there is no harm in having national holidays to remember important people or events, and it could be argued that it follows such practices in the Scriptures.**

**The problem comes when these come to the front and the traditional church calendar fades into the background.**

And that often happens because Jesus reminded us that we cannot serve two masters... This great principle applies to time as well as to money. That becomes pretty obvious when we see Easter and Christmas replaced with spring and winter vacations! As we saw, times and seasons become nothing more than natural events and the seven day week is just a habit that we picked up along the way.

So why is all of this important? As I pointed out, the church calendar is an important aid in keeping Jesus at the center of our lives. When Jesus is left out of these greater times and seasons, it is not long before He is forgotten in our everyday lives. Sure we still read our Bibles and go to Church, but He is absent from our "secular" life that is controlled by our secular calendar.

Many today would struggle to say what part of the church calendar they were in during the year, but EVERYONE knows if it is a Presidential election year or what sport's season we are in. Sadly most Christian families do not plan their time or vacations around church events, but they are slaves to the school calendar!

This is the important point about times and seasons that King Solomon drives home in our morning text... We must remember that the whole point of Ecclesiastes is to show the vanity of ALL things in life when you consider things only "under the sun" or without God in a secular world. This included many "good" things like charity, wisdom, respect, riches, pleasure and yes times and seasons!

Those of us who are a bit older know that even these amazing verses that were given as a warning to not forget God were brought down to a purely secular level, or under the sun ironically, when they became a famous anti-war song in the 1960's!

All of us will face some or all of these important choices at some point in our lives and if we do not seek God's wisdom and keep Jesus at the center of our lives then our choices will all be vain choices. It should be natural to have seasons in our lives and we should welcome them! *[share a bit about our move]*

As we consider these times in our text again in closing, please keep in mind the conclusion of the matter that King Solomon drove home in this important book, a conclusion that is stressed in a proper use of the Church calendar and the joyous season of Advent: "Fear God and Keep His Commandments because this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Ecclesiastes 2 "1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: 2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; 3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, & a time to throw away; 7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; 8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.

9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. 12 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him."

Communion Meditation: Luke 2"9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"